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ABSTRACT

This pamphlet for parents in English presents the components of the "No Child Left Behind" policy of the George W. Bush administration. Prefaced with remarks by President Bush and Secretary of Education Rod Paige, the pamphlet discusses the importance of high academic standards and provides guidance for parents in interpreting test scores. The pamphlet also discusses how parents can hold their child's school accountable for results. In addition, the pamphlet discusses how parents can prepare their children to be strong readers and how parents can help children with homework. The pamphlet concludes with a list of Web site resources for obtaining additional information. (KB)

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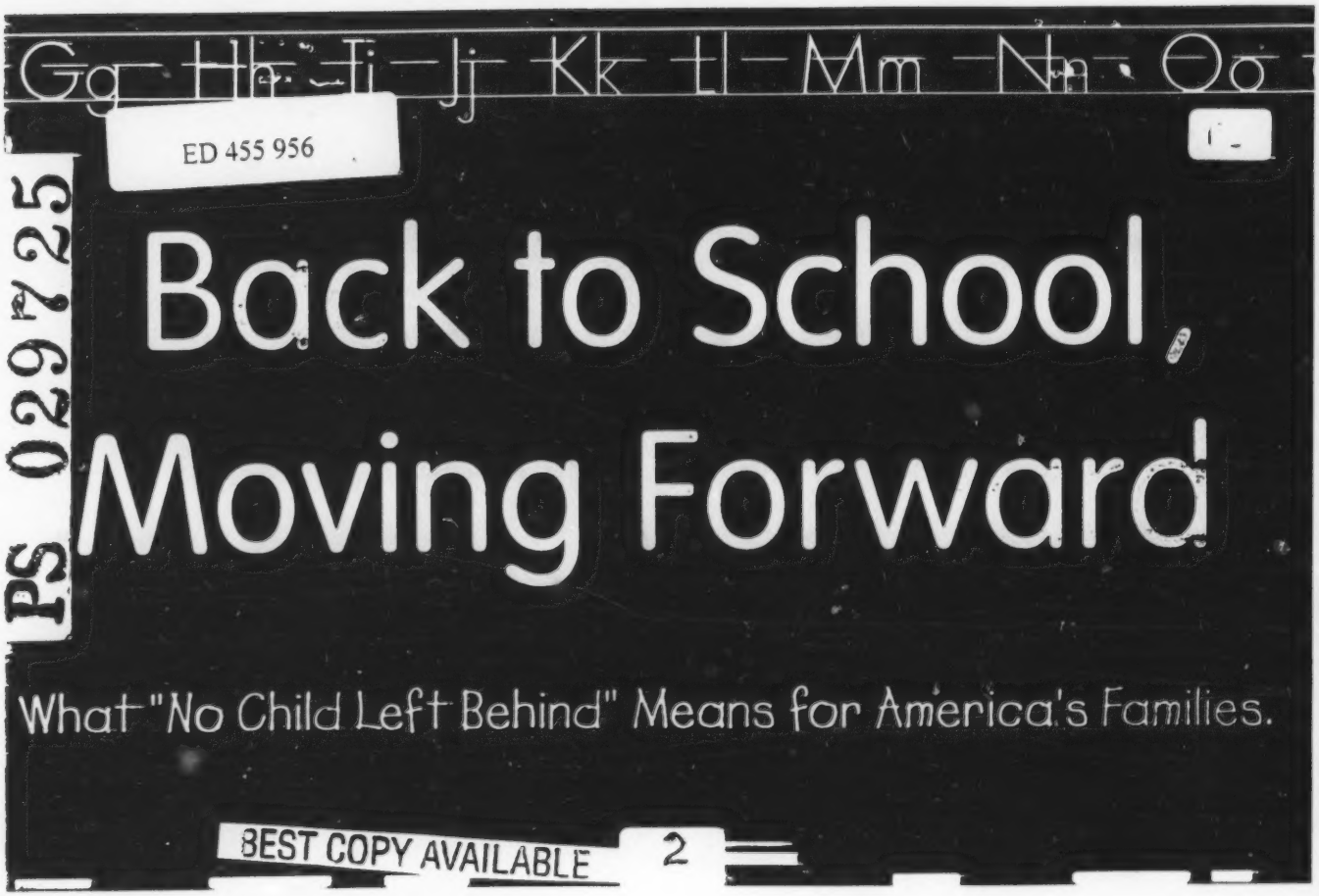
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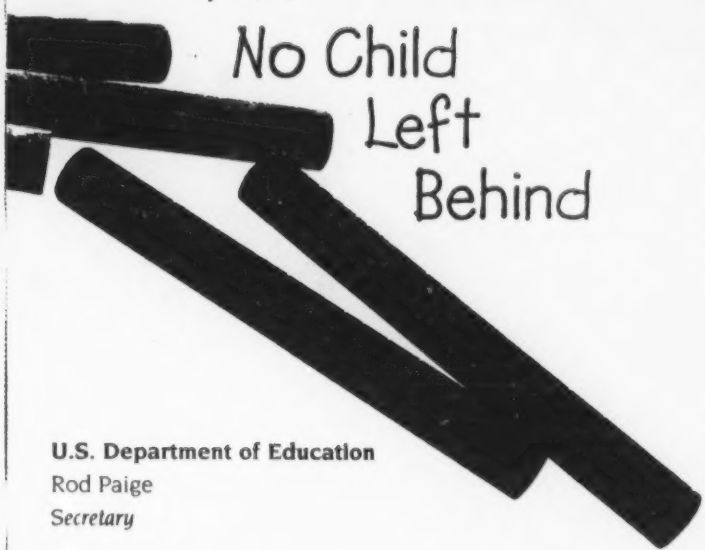

U.S. Department of Education
Rod Paige
Secretary

Office of Interagency and Intergovernmental Affairs
Laurie M. Rich
Assistant Secretary

Office of the Secretary
Office of Public Affairs
Lindsey C. Kozberg
Director

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Back to School,
Moving Forward

What No *Child Left Behind* Means for America's Families

Foreword by President George W. Bush

As a former student, the father of two high school graduates, and the husband of a teacher, I've learned many lessons about what makes a school good and an education excellent. The more I see, the more I am convinced of one thing: given the right guidance and motivation, every child can learn and reach his or her potential. Great schools do great works in the life of a child, and I have seen it happen. But we must do more.

I am committed to ensuring that the federal role in education serves the children first and foremost and not just the system. My Administration has put forward a plan to Congress titled No Child Left Behind that is based on four principles: (1) accountability for results; (2) local control and flexibility; (3) expanded parental choice; and (4) effective and successful programs. We are pursuing these principles because too many of our schools fail to help every child to learn.

As we prepare our children to return to school, we should reflect on how we can improve their education. It's time for our schools to set high standards for what our children should know and be able to do, to give our schools the tools they need to help every child reach those high standards, and to insist that they reach them. We know that every child can learn. Now is the time to ensure that every child does.

As parents, you are your children's first and foremost teachers and their strongest advocates. You have a critical role to play—both in the way you raise your children and in the way you work for meaningful and accurate accountability in their schools. This book will show you the way to help change their schools for the better.

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Letter from the Secretary

In 1965, Congress created a role for the federal government in education. Among other things, that role committed the government to helping students from disadvantaged backgrounds to receive a quality education and thus gain access to a bright future.

While states and districts still have the lion's share of responsibility for educating our children, we are working with the Congress to ensure that the federal role advances the kind of reform that improves our educational system. They plan to make great changes in our practices and in the way we think about government and schools. We must make sure that the federal government really does help the students who face the biggest challenges. We can do our part in Washington, but improvement in your local schools starts with you.

No one cares more about your child's future than you do, and no one is better positioned to hold schools accountable for performance than you are. You have a right to know whether your child is really learning at school, and your state and your school district should make sure you have that information. If your child is not making adequate progress in school, you can and must ask why. A good teacher will be happy to answer your questions. Do your part and ask.

Rod Paige

Rod Paige

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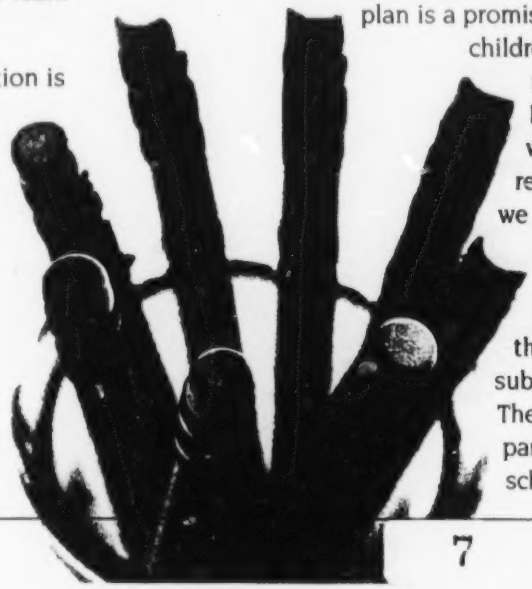
Introduction

America is blessed with many excellent schools. However, when it comes to a public duty as essential as educating children, "many" is not enough. Every child deserves to learn at an excellent school.

While the federal role in education is small when compared to the responsibilities of state and local governments, President Bush's Administration and Congress are committed to using this role to improve the culture of education and encourage reform throughout the system. The source of a good education is found in the family. You are your children's first teacher. You play a critical role in ensuring that they make steady progress in school, that they go to schools that hold them to high standards, and that the schools help them meet those standards.



The heart of President Bush's *No Child Left Behind* plan is a promise to raise standards for all children and to help all children meet those standards. Because we cannot know whether schoolchildren are reaching those standards unless we measure performance, President Bush's plan requires annual tests for all children in grades three through eight in the core subjects of reading and math. These assessments will allow parents and officials to hold schools accountable for ensuring

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that every child learns. Finally, President Bush is committed to promoting the very best teaching programs, especially those that teach young children how to read. His plan, in partnership with parents, communities, and schools, ensures that every child in America will receive an excellent education.

This guide will show you—

- What high standards mean and do
- What to look for in test scores
- How to hold your child's school accountable for results
- How to prepare your child to be a strong reader
- How to help your child with homework, and
- Where to turn for help

> *"Some say it is unfair to hold disadvantaged children to rigorous standards. I say it is discrimination to require anything less. It is the soft bigotry of low expectations."*
>
> *President George W. Bush*

Raising Standards, Lifting Children

Everyone who spends time with children learns a vivid lesson: children want to meet the expectations of adults. If these expectations are low, children will miss their true potential. When expectations are high, amazing progress can happen. Teachers, parents, grandparents, and neighbors should all challenge children to read well, to do advanced math, to learn history, and to understand science.

Under President Bush's plan, states will set high standards in the core subjects of reading and math. Well-crafted and thoughtful standards should explain in plain language exactly what students are expected to know and be able to do by the end of each grade. They should set clear expectations so that teachers, parents, and communities can all understand what

should occur in the classroom. Families can and must participate in setting these standards. Once they are in place, families should ask their children's schools to lay out clearly what the standards are and what each child should be learning.

President Bush believes that every child can learn and that every child deserves to be challenged. Families should encourage and challenge children to learn more every day. If your child fails at a task, don't make excuses—make a plan for accomplishing the task and work toward it together. Insist on high standards from your child, your child's school, and yourself.

Annual Testing: Learning What Works

Just as you can't judge a book by its cover, you can't judge a school by its location or its design. Some rundown schools in poor areas are making great progress at improving student performance, while some suburban schools with fancy athletic equipment and new science labs are failing to educate many of their students adequately—particularly their disadvantaged and minority students. The only sure way for parents to know how their children's schools are doing is to examine the regular, objective information on student progress that the president's plan will require all public schools to produce. The best way to obtain that useful information is through standards-based assessments—or tests.

Taking a test is like going to a doctor for a check-up. Just like a check-up, a test can tell you what kind of

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help you need and where you need it most. It also gives your children a chance to demonstrate what they have learned. While tests may intimidate, just like a doctor's office, they are safe and effective.

If a state fails to use standardized tests, the state will have a hard time making sure no child is forgotten and no classroom is slipping through the cracks. The same is true for districts and schools. Through effective testing, communities and parents can learn which schools are doing the best. They can also discover the methods that work the best and encourage their wider adoption.

If your state starts testing in reading and math, you can expect to get much more information every year on how your children are doing in school. Go over the information carefully, take note of your children's strengths and weaknesses, understand how their classes work and what their teachers are doing, and talk to your children about how you can help them progress toward the academic standards set for their grade.

One thing you may hear when people discuss testing is that teachers will "teach to the test." The important thing to remember is that each state must choose a test that matches what children are expected to learn. A well-designed test really measures those things a state wants every child to know and be able to do.

Looking at Progress

Another benefit of annual testing is that it allows us to identify successful schools. Previously, we looked

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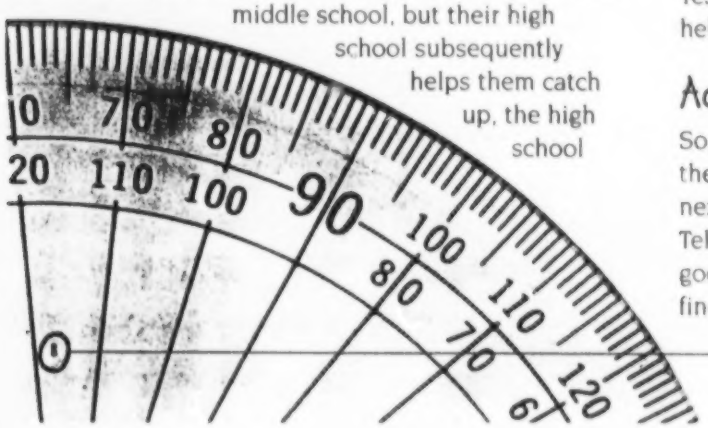
only at average test scores for states and sometimes for districts or schools. These scores gave us some information about school performance, but not the complete picture. Thanks to annual tests, we can look at a child's progress in each grade or class. We can consider how students perform from start to finish and can identify and reward schools that are truly helping their students make progress along the way.

For example, if children are neglected by a particular middle school, but their high school subsequently helps them catch up, the high school deserves recognition. More to the point, tests can help us identify the problems that need fixing while the students are still in the underperforming middle school, and thus we can make things better for future students by improving the middle school's teaching methods. Children who go to high school without having mastered elementary and middle school material will only fall further behind, and will find it harder to catch up. The president's plan anticipates correcting these kinds of problems early. Testing every year in grades three through eight will help us do that.



Accountability

So, you've read the test scores for your children, their classes, their schools, and their district. What next? If your child's school is excelling, celebrate. Tell the teachers and principal you appreciate their good work in helping your child progress, but then find out what their goals are for further progress.

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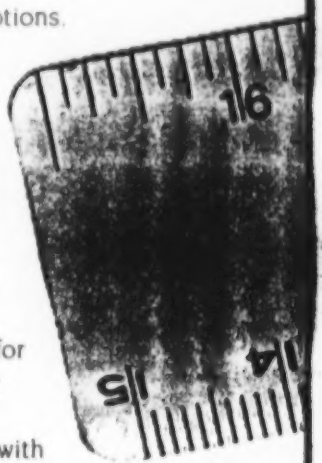
Write a letter to your local paper thanking the school for its success and suggesting new educational horizons. After all, even great schools can still improve. A school's "report card" gives everyone good information on where the school needs improvement.

For 35 years, the federal role in education has been aimed at helping the schools that face the biggest challenges. One thing we should never do is tolerate schools that fail year after year. A school that cannot teach and will not change requires outside intervention.

If a school or a particular classroom is not doing well, you may want to ask the principal or the teacher how you can help it do better. Take a look at the rest of the school and at neighboring schools to find models for success. Also consider offering your time to help the school improve. If these methods don't work or seem unlikely to have any positive effect, then consider other options. Some families have chosen other public schools, magnet schools, private schools, parochial schools, homeschooling and charter schools, or to supplement their current school with a tutoring program. Figure out what choices you have, and weigh them carefully. Watch for more options created by new reforms—particularly for disadvantaged families. Talk with other parents about what they do. No one cares more about your children's future than you do, and no one can make better decisions about their education than you can.



Whatever you decide, continue to insist on high standards from your children and their teachers.

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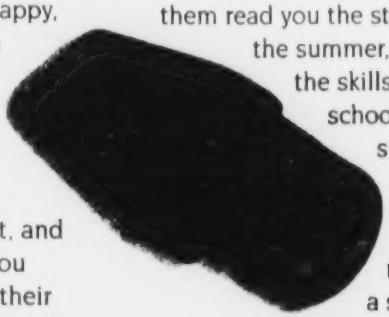
Doing What Works: Evidence-Based Reading

You are your children's first and best teacher. Other than helping them to grow up healthy and happy, the most important thing you can do is help them with reading skills. Reading is the foundation of all learning. In fact, President Bush has called reading the new civil right.

Even very young children benefit from being read to every day, from learning the alphabet, and from sounding out words. Ask them to tell you stories about the characters and pictures in their books. Show them that reading is interesting and fun, and help them to think about and experiment with words, sounds, and letters by showing them printed words and talking with them about what they read. Let your children see you reading a newspaper, a magazine, or a good book.



When children start school, the need to help them with reading doesn't go away. Reading together after school can help reinforce the lessons learned every day. Help them with their spelling words, and have them read you the stories they have written. Over the summer, children can forget many of the skills they learned during the last school year. Make it a habit next summer to take turns reading with your children every day.

As you read, discuss the relationship between words in a sentence, how descriptive language can draw a picture, and how the different parts of a story fit together. Ask your children questions about a book after they have read it. Give your children frequent opportunities to write about different situations and from different perspectives. Have them write a story, write a report on something that happened to them, give

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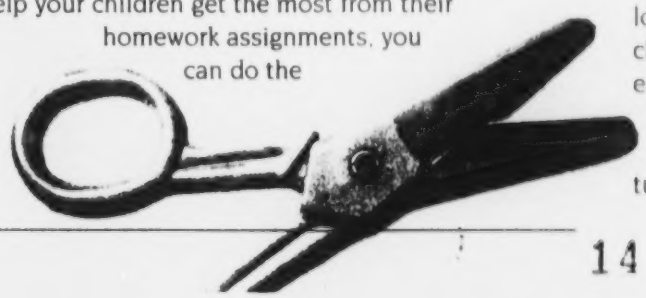
directions, and make an argument for a certain decision. Practice makes perfect.

Helping Your Child with Homework

Homework is not just an opportunity for students to learn. It also allows you to learn about your children's skills. If you review and assist with homework, you will know where your children are excelling and where they need help or lack enthusiasm for what they are learning. Your interest and involvement will also help your children to understand that learning is not only important, it can also be fun and rewarding.

To help your children get the most from their homework assignments, you can do the following:



- Set up a quiet place in your home with good lighting where your children can do their homework assignments.
- Create a schedule for children to make it clear that homework should be complete before dinner, after dinner, or before watching television or playing games.
- If your children do not have homework, talk to their teacher about activities you can do together at home to prepare them better for classroom work.
- If a child puts off doing homework, take a closer look at the reasons why. It could be that the child has difficulty with the subject and needs extra help from you or from the teacher.
- If your children have trouble with homework assignments, you can look to older students, tutors, and teachers for extra help.

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Resources

Interested in learning more about improving your child's education? If you have access to the Internet, go to **www.ed.gov** for Department of Education resources plus links to other organizations. If you don't have a computer, you can call **1-800-USA-LEARN**.

- For general information on back to school, and to order copies of this booklet, visit **www.ed.gov/backtoschool/**
- The *National Reading Panel* produces objective reports about what works and what doesn't in reading. **www.nationalreadingpanel.org**
- The *National Institute of Child Health and Human Development* offers health and education information for parents. **www.nichd.nih.gov/publications/health.htm**
- The *Partnership for Family Involvement in Education* offers tips for getting involved in your child's school. **www.pfie.ed.gov**

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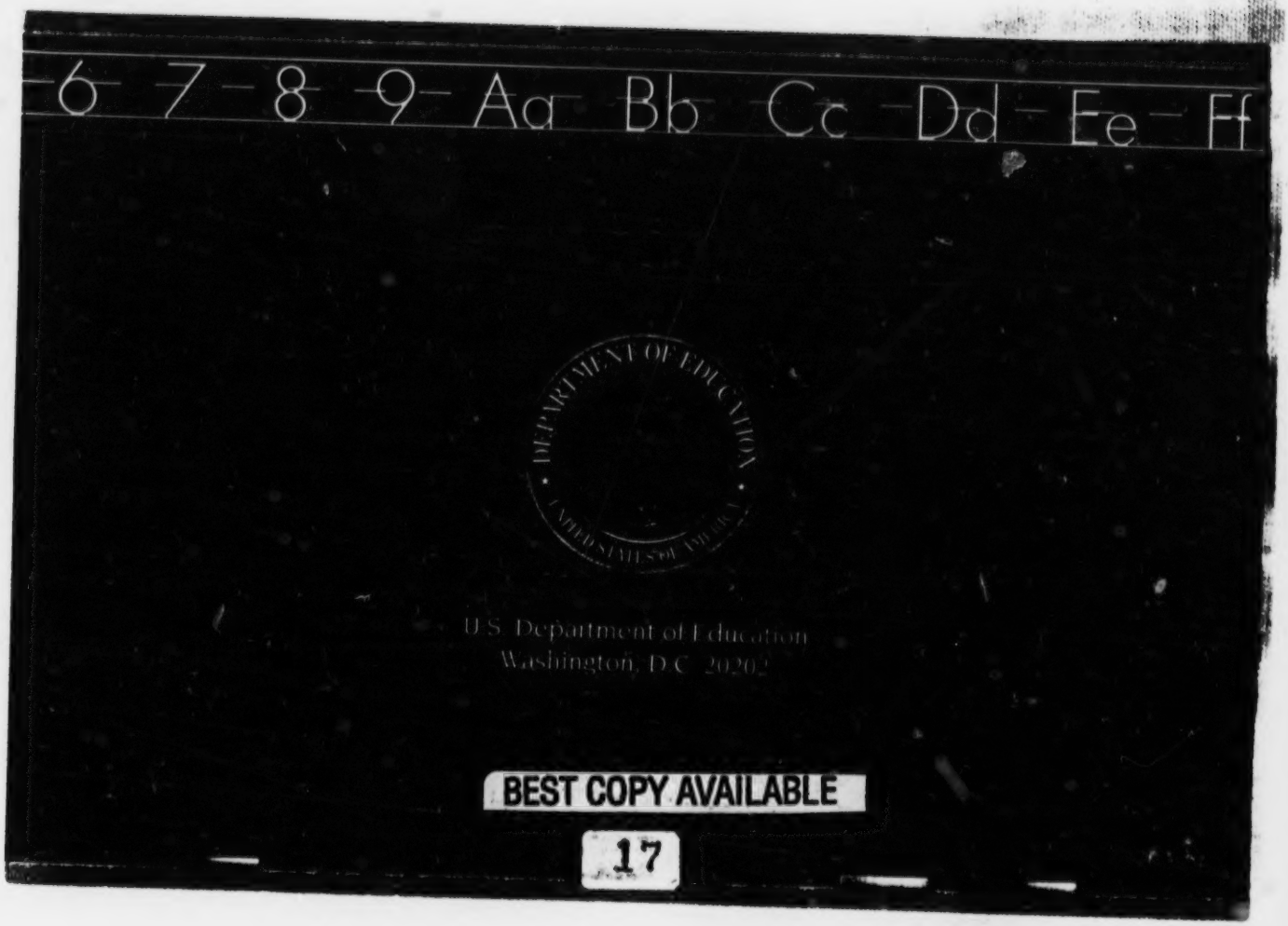

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